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AUTHOR Dahl, Katherine
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ABSTRACT

Selection policies, library handbooks, and other documents issued by American bible college libraries were examined to see what commitments they have or have not made to intellectual freedom. Many of the libraries were found to have directly addressed censorship matters. Some libraries took strong stands in support of the freedom to read, but others.took stands in direct opposition to the freedom to read. It is concluded that not all libraries appear to be fully committed to intellectual freedom, and a united front among all libraries in censorship battles does not exist. (35 notes including references) (EW)

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INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM STANDS OF AMERICAN BIBLE COLLEGE LIBRARIES: TAKEN OR NOT TAKEN

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Katherine Dahl
University Library
Western Illinois University

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ABSTRACT

Selection policies, library handbooks, and other documents issued by American bible college libraries were examined to see what commitments were or were not made to intellectual freedom. Many of the libraries directly addressed censorship matters. Some libraries took stands in support of the freedom to read that could not be any stronger; other libraries took stands in direct opposition to the freedom to read. The importance of this investigation lies in the fact that it revealed that not all libraries are committed to intellectual freedom and to the freedom to read. As regards censorship battles, a united front among all libraries does not exist.

A united front---a united front among libraries regarding matters of intellectual freedom and censorship: is it or is it not too much to hope that all libraries in the country, regardless of type of institution they represent, stand together in support of intellectual freedom and in opposition to censorship? Should some libraries be excused from the

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front because of the type of institution they represent? What about bible college libraries? Do they believe they should be fighting censorship battles? Are they willing to fight on the freedom-to-read side? Are they in the intellectual freedom line?

In order to make those determinations I solicited from bible college libraries throughout the country copies of their various policy and selection guides and statements.[1] All accredited members of the American Association of Bible Colleges (AABC) were contacted, as were candidates and applicants for AABC accreditation and some colleges not yet associated with the AABC.[2] Two-thirds of the 111 colleges contacted responded in some way. With this exception, I promised the libraries anonymity: laudatory remarks, from the perspective of an intellectual freedom advocate, might be brought to the world's attention.

Many of the bible college libraries are in line -- and on the freedom-to-read side. Some have formal statements in support of intellectual freedom and against censorship that could not be more strongly expressed and could be used as models by libraries of any and all kinds who have weaker statements. A smaller group of bible college libraries make statements which make it very doubtful that they will ever do battle against censorship. Others make no mention of intellectual freedom and/or censorship in their guides. Another group has never or not yet formulated a policy guide,

so their position or positions remains unknown (except for letters received by me in which library or college officials speak, sometimes with reservations, in favor of intellectual freedom).

The pro and con declarations are most often found in the libraries' policy guides under sections variously entitled Complaints and Censorship, Complaints Policy and Procedures, Intellectual Freedom, Intellectual Freedom and Censorship, Policy for Controversial Materials, and Questionable Materials.

Libraries having access to the AABC's Guidelines for Bible College Libraries[3] are encouraged in that document to include in their collection development policies a statement or section on censorship matters. While the guidelines do not expand upon the issue of censorship or state that AABC libraries should oppose censorship, nowhere is it implied that AABC libraries should be in favor of censorship or should equivocate on matters of intellectual freedom.

Some of the bible school libraries, it is apparent, have read the standard works on selection and collection development (where intellectual freedom matters are often discussed) and have duly given the authors of those works credit.

Examining the materials submitted by these libraries caused me, as a freedom-to-read advocate, to both cheer and boo, tear out my hair and leave it intact, shout hallelujah

and shout something else.

Baring all, one bible college library's policy guide states that:

> Morally objectionable materials are censored at the discretion of the librarian. The library serves an adult community. Consequently, censorship is not prevalent or encouraged except when clearly necessary.
>
> A disclaimer is placed inside the front cover of each book (except Bibles) indicating that the College and Seminary do not necessarily agree with its contents.[4]

Since the statements are not expanded upon further, the library's definition of "morally objectionable materials" is not known exactly. Certainly the disclaimer means that the precepts of the American Library Association's (ALA) "Statement on Labeling: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights"[5] are not being followed. Choosing to follow that statement's precepts, another library makes clear that it "will not place disclaimer labels in books which may be at variance with the college's position or views."[6]

Bible college library "C" declares that it excludes:

> Books which are offensive to good taste or contrary to moral and ethical standards, as judged by Biblical standards [and]
>
> Books on public questions presenting one side of a question only and/or which are written in a violent, sensational, or inflammatory manner.[7]

Such a policy insures, it would seem, the exclusion, among others, of the books of William F. Buckley, Milton Friedman, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Michael Harrington, since those authors tend to focus upon their point of view, their "side of a question."

A dilemma exists for some of the libraries: they are expected to select materials which "conform ... to the philosophy and goals of the College," yet they realize "the need for diverse viewpoints"[8] in their collections. That need exists because librarians at many of the bible colleges understand that the institutions of which they are a part want to graduate students who are examiners, investigators, and thinkers.

That great diverse-viewpoint-espousing document, the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, is paid heed by a number of the libraries (some libraries paraphrase the entire bill without giving proper credit).

Unfortunately, more than one library seemed to be tampering with the Library Bill of Rights, adapting and modifying it so that it was not its true self. Every library-affiliated person must decide for himself (or herself) if he (or she) could accept a policy guide that states, as did one bible college library's policy, that:

> The Library Bill of Rights and the reader's Freedom to Read will be the standards for selection insofar as the objectives of the private institution and the directives of the Board of Directors are not violated.[9]

Equivocation is not allowed with the Library Bill of Rights!

The ALA's Library Bill of Rights is not, then, the only library-related bill of rights that exists: a few of these libraries literally wrote their own. In one of those local, as it were, bill of rights, a library makes clear that it excludes:

> Materials which, in the opinion of the leadership of this college, advocate philosophies involving grave risk to the spiritual well-being of our students [and]
>
> Items which openly advocate behavior in direct violation of scripture.[10]

No clues are given as to specific titles that, negatively, "fit" that bill of rights.

Other libraries, however, seemed to indicate that the students' spiritual well-being could withstand the onslaught of differing philosophies. Those libraries purposely selected books from and about other creeds, sects, and denominations -- other ways of believing, other ways of thinking.

The bible college library that wants its collection to be "a harmonious body of literature"[11] never explains what might constitute disharmonious titles. Can there, it must be asked, be intellectual freedom without disharmonious titles?

In a few policy guides faculty members are asked to become readers' advisers; for example:

> Faculty members have a vital part in the guidance and encouragement of student use of the library.... The library depends on the faculty member to guide the student in his reading of books with a liberal slant or other books where caution is advisable.[12]

A bright, of sorts, spot in the preceding situation is that the library apparently has the "liberal" and "other" books in its collection.

Another library, whose slogan is "Read with Discernment," asks (not unexpectedly) the college faculty to "train their students to 'read with discernment.'"[13] The focus appears to

be upon books dealing with theological doctrine. Whether other types of books are also to be read -- oh, so carefully -- is not made clear.

Library "Q," even though it had an admirable John Stuart Mill-like statement about the necessity of "expos[ing] ... students to both truth and error,"[14] asserted that "the instructor should be personally familiar with controversial materials requested and should assign material with discretion."[15]

Possibly treading in an area where few librarians tread, Library "Q" ended its Policy on the Use of Controversial Materials by suggesting that

> The contents of an instructor's personal library, whether at home or on campus, is (sic) subject solely to his own judgment. The instructor should permit students to use materials from his own library with a discretion comparable to that required at the library.[16]

That from a library which said it formulated its selection policy regarding controversial materials "to provide academic freedom for the faculty"[17] (and the faculty adopted the policy)! Two "b" words, made frightening by the ways in which they are used, have come to the fore: discernment and discretion.

To their credit many of the libraries have developed procedures for dealing with complaints about items in the collection. Not to the credit of some of those libraries, books are taken out of circulation while committees or

individuals determine the books' fate. Even though the final decision may be not to remove the book from the collection, for a period of time that book was sequestered unjustly.

Laurels go to a Laurel, Mississippi bible college for insisting in its policy guide that "access to the material will not be restricted during the period of reconsideration,"[18] and kudos go to a Kosciusko, Mississippi bible college for similarly insisting that while complaint procedures are being followed, "The materials shall remain in use."[19]

Unfortunately, a few libraries are still in the permanently-sequestering-books business:

> Items found to be questionable may be placed on closed shelves or may be removed from the collection.[20]

The closed-shelves titles get, of course, A Label in the card catalog.

Feeling guilty, it would seem, about the closed shelves for questionable materials, the preceding library came up with a following-orders defense for itself:

> It is understood that users of the collection should have an opportunity to study opposing viewpoints and this privilege is provided within the guidelines of the parent institution and its supporting denomination.[21]

Should closed shelves for "questionable materials" ever be part of any library's guidelines -- and should any library be, in effect, forced by a ruling body to include that as part of its guidelines?

Bible college library "E" had two options for books found to be "offensive":

> Retain ... and keep on the shelf [or]
> Retain ... and keep in private possession of librarian for specific studies.[22]

Can anyone, in light of the horrific implications of "private possession of librarian," compliment that library for not including as an option removal of the material(s) from the library?

And does anyone mourn the books whose lives at library "M" were terminated?:

> Since the library would not wish to offend any brother, should the committee decide that the complaint was valid, but the material should still be available upon request, it will be set aside in a designated area of the library office. Should another comparable book be available, the offending article will be promptly discarded.[23]

The sins committed against intellectual freedom and the freedom to read in some of the policies are outweighed by the good words written in behalf of intellectual freedom and the freedom to read in many of the other policies.

Many of the libraries expressed a desire to provide for their users materials covering many points of view -- not just a fundamentalist point of view, not just a Pentecostal point of view, not even just a theistic point of view. One library (and it was not alone) went so far as to suggest "that all views on religions and social, political, and moral issues should be represented in the collection."[24]

The inspiration here, of course, is none other than the ALA's Library Bill of Rights.

A number of libraries emphasized that the institutions of which they were a part were very much interested in students' intellectual growth, that spiritual growth was not the only concern. The libraries realized that they could not contribute fully toward intellectual growth if they offered students a narrow repertoire of reading materials, if they were not a "vital, intellectual resource."[25]

One library wanted to be certain it had materials which would "enable students to explore various contiguous areas on their own."[26] So what if the contiguous leads into the dangerous, the forbidden, the unknown? That bible college library is not afraid, nor is the library which says it "will make available ... materials offering a variety of viewpoints regardless of the popularity of those viewpoints."[27] It is as if some of the librarians who have written these policy guides and statements have accepted Mill's assurance that truth will be stronger in "its collision with error."[28]

The library which said it selected materials "without regard to denomination or sect"[29] had several soul-mates, including the library which said that "no materials shall be excluded from the collection because of the ... religious views expressed therein"[30] (this library did not forget to also say it would not exclude materials because of their "political, moral, or religious views").[31]

The library which predicted that "there will be times when materials will be found [in the collection] which directly contradicts (sic) the views of this college and of the Church of God"[32] never mentioned plans to get rid of those materials. Hallelujah! Let the materials stay and may they never be put, for safekeeping, in the "private possession" of any librarian!

No bible college library provided a better justification for including in its collection other-points-of-view material than did the following:

> Materials which may not represent the truth of God's Word are in the library ... as part of the educational purpose of the school. There are materials which are acquired and retained in order to teach about cultures, trends, movements, and philosophies with which [our] students, faculty, staff, and alumni will work, and to which they will minister. The presence of these materials is neither an endorsement not a condemnation of their contents or their authors.[33]

Bible college libraries still in the process of formulating their policies would do well to incorporate such a declaration.

One bible college whose library had not completed their policy statement communicated with me through an academic dean who assured me that his library "allows and encourages opposing viewpoints to be presented in its collection."[34] That official went on to assert that the library at his institution "probably achieves greater balance than many of its secular counterparts who seem to overlook or ignore the

offerings of serious Bible-believing scholars."[35] Intellectual freedom, of course, demands that balance.

For the most part, the policy guides and statements of these bible college libraries have left me optimistic that most of the libraries can be counted on to defend intellectual freedom and to resist censorship. My intellectual-freedom heart was uplifted by many of the policies. When it was not, I could only hope that the libraries with the offending sections in their policy guides will one day soon understand the necessity and value of leaving knowledge and information unfettered.

NOTES

[1]Bible colleges are not primarily theological schools or liberal arts schools (although a few say they are or want to also be liberal arts institutions). According to the American Association of Bible Colleges (AABC), "the primary purpose of the Bible college is to prepare men and women for church-related vocations. Additionally, it provides training for lay or avocational ministries and offers preparatory courses in view of more advanced studies" (AABC Directory, 1986-1987. Fayetteville, Ark.: AABC [1986?], p. 1). Oral Roberts University and CBN University, for example, do not fit the AABC-definition of a bible college. The Jimmy Swaggart Bible College, however, does fit that definition.

[2]Some of these bible colleges are also accredited by other accrediting bodies, including the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

[3]Guidelines for Bible College Libraries: Adapted with Permission of the American Library Association from Standards for College Libraries, 1986. Fayetteville, Ark.: American Association of Bible Colleges [1987?], section 2.2 and Appendix A.2.

[4]Library "G," "A Proposed Collection Development Policy," latest copy, p. 7. (Because I promised the libraries anonymity, they are usually referred to by a letter instead of their actual name.)

[5]Intellectual Freedom Manual. 2nd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 1983, p. 32.

[6]Library "N," "Library Policy," latest copy, p. 2.

[7]Library "C," "Library Purpose and Objectives," latest copy, p. 4.

[8]Library "N," p. 3.

[9]Library "S," "Selection Policy ...," latest copy, [p. 3].

[10]Library "B," "Intellectual Freedom Policy," latest copy, [p. 1].

[11]Library "G," p. 2.

[12]Library "U," "Faculty Handbook," latest copy, p. 40.

[13]Library "T," "[Library Faculty Handbook]," latest copy, p. 42.

[14]Library "Q," "Policy on Use of Controversial Materials," latest copy, [p. 1].

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Library "V," "Collection Development Policy," latest copy, p. 10.

[19]Library "F," "[Library Policy Guide]," latest copy, p. 10.

[20]Library "W," "[Policy Manual]," latest copy, p. 56.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Library "H," "Policy for Controversial Materials," latest copy, [p. 1].

[23]Library "M," "Library Selection Policy," p. 3. Since Library "M" did not yet have its own policy, it was using the policy of the library with which it merged.

[24]Library "A," "A Collection Development Policy ...," latest copy, p. 58.

[25]Library "Y," "Statement of Mission and Objectives," latest copy, [n.p.].

[26]Library "E," "Library Philosophy," latest copy, p. 2.

[27]Library "J," "Collection Development Policy," latest copy, p. 4.

[28]Mill, John Stuart. On Liberty. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1947, p. 16.

[29]Library "P," General Policies," latest copy [n.p.].

[30]Library "I," "... Bible College Library," latest copy, p. 2.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Library "K," "Intellectual Freedom Policy," latest copy [p. 1].

[33]Library "B," "Statement of Policy and Development," latest copy, p. 5.

[34]Academic Dean, Library "R." Letter to author, 17 July 1987.

[35]Ibid.